



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Societal pessimism: A study of its conceptualization, causes, correlates and consequences

Steenvoorden, E.H.

Publication date

2016

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Steenvoorden, E. H. (2016). *Societal pessimism: A study of its conceptualization, causes, correlates and consequences*.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

CHAPTER 8

Explaining identity complexity. Sociotropic uncertainty and political-geographic identification in Europe¹

8.1 Introduction

The final consequence of societal pessimism that I investigate in this book is multiple identification with integrative, political-geographical groups. Citizens' identification with their political community is viewed as critical to its functioning (Miller, 1995). A superordinate or collective identity engenders prioritization of the collective interest over individual self-interest (Kramer & Brewer, 1984), over subgroup interests such as ethnicity (Transue, 2007) and stimulates cooperation between members (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). This chapter addresses the simultaneous identification with multiple political-geographical groups. It argues that societal pessimism, along with other attitudes that tap into sociotropic uncertainty, mitigate such multiple identification.

Europeans belong to several political communities: local, national and European. That is not to say that they identify with all of these groups to the same extent. On the one hand, the globalization of society is argued to stimulate multiple identification, resulting in hybrid combinations of identities (Geschiere & Meyer, 1998; Arnett, 2002; Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). On the other hand, recent decades have witnessed an increasing politicization of identity in Europe that stresses the exclusivity of identities. In many countries, regional or national identity is a subject of political mobilization (Huici et al., 1997; Mudde, 2007; Paasi, 2009; Duyvendak, 2011), and the European Union is viewed with reservations (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010). This chapter aims to investigate how societal pessimism affects the concurrent identification with these

1 A previous version of this chapter is presented as Steenvoorden, E.H. and Wright, M. (2014) 'Inclusive optimists versus exclusive pessimists? The effect of societal pessimism on identification patterns in Europe', at the ECPR General Conference 2014, Glasgow.

political communities. I theorize that it is likely that societal pessimism mitigates such simultaneous identification with integrative, political-geographical groups, instead increasing the likelihood of more exclusive identification, if any. The sociotropic uncertainty causes people to seek security from clear, homogenous collective groups that give direction and meaning. I argue that this logic is applicable not only to societal pessimism but also to other types of sociotropic uncertainty, such as political distrust and negative economic expectations.

The extent to which people identify with multiple collective groups and what stimulates or mitigates such multiple identification is unclear. There is consensus that people can hold multiple identities (Kohli, 2000; Brewer, 2001; Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001; Díez Medrano & Gutiérrez, 2001; Risse, 2004), but beyond this recognition, few ask what conditions stimulate or mitigate multiple identification.

In what follows, I use insights from literatures on ‘uncertainty-identity’ (Hogg, 2000; Reid & Hogg, 2005; Hogg, Adelman, & Blagg, 2010; Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010; Hohman, Hogg, & Bligh, 2010; Grant & Hogg, 2012) and the ‘need-for-closure’ (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Kruglanski et al., 2006), which focus on egotropic types of uncertainty, to make a case about sociotropic uncertainty and how it affects individual identity complexity. With data from the Eurobarometer survey series, I show that sociotropic uncertainty encourages identity retrenchment, or in other words, that concerned individuals will express a less complex pattern of identities. I am agnostic about *which* identities individuals will fall back to; instead, I identify a general pattern in which concerned individuals are likely to retreat to a simpler set of identities and allegiances.

8.2 Theory

Conceptualization of collective identity

There is a comprehensive literature on social identity, with streams of research focusing on ethnic, racial, religious, gender and geographical identity, among others. These social identities are ‘we’ identities, identifications of an individual with a group or a category, as opposed to ‘me’ identities, which are identifications of the individual with social types, roles or characteristics (Brewer, 2001; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). In this chapter, I focus on spatially defined collective groups that can be called integrative because they connect people within a politically unified territory with no other necessary connection.²

2 This excludes identities usually viewed as ‘ascribed’ in character, including race and gender. Religious and class identities, which have something of an ascriptive nature yet are more plastic than race or gender, represent cases that are somewhat more difficult in this regard.

Typically, national identity is emphasized as both the most elementary and minimal form of cohesion for a democratic political system to sustain (Easton, 1975; Miller, 1995; Schildkraut, 2014). That said, there has also been a great deal of interest in the development of a European identity (e.g. Citrin & Sides, 2004; Fligstein, 2008; Risse, 2010; Citrin & Wright, 2014). It is difficult (if not impossible) to do justice to these literatures here. Of special relevance, though, are some further points of a definitional nature. First, ‘identity’ can be described as the most basal sense of belonging, defined as “a subjective or internalized sense of belonging” (Huddy & Khatib, 2007: 65) that is distinct from chauvinism. Again, although the example of national identity is the best developed in the literature, we can apply the same type of definition to one’s town or city identity – also referred to as ‘place attachment’ (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) – and EU identity.

In general, three dimensions of identity are distinguished: a content-based, a cognitive, and an affective aspect of the concept of identity (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001; Bellucci, Sanders, & Serricchio, 2012). The first dimension refers to idiosyncratic characteristics (Abdelal et al., 2009): what does it mean to be Parisian, French or European? The cognitive dimension reflects the extent to which people think of themselves as a member of a group. Social identity theory, for instance, points to the influence of identifying as member of or belonging to a social group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004 [1986]). Researchers in that tradition have shown how even ad hoc and meaningless categorization, the so-called minimal group condition, suffices for people to identify as a member of a group and show intergroup discrimination. However, this *identification as a member of a group* does not reveal the importance of the identity for individuals’ self-image.

This is captured in the third, affective, dimension, which is referred to as *identification with* (e.g. Citrin & Sears, 2009). Here, the idea is that people can identify with a group to a greater or lesser extent. The affective dimension thus describes the strength or intensity of the identification. This conceptualization dovetails with self-categorization theory, which elaborates on social identity theory and introduces the influence of salience and context (Turner et al., 1987). This means that self-categorization acknowledges variability in the strength of identification. The affective dimension also gives room to acknowledge that identity is becoming more a subject of choice, which is also referred to as a change from ascribed identities to acquired identities (Huddy, 2001). It is the affective component that is of greatest interest here because I want to examine the level of identification with different groups concurrently, not identification with a group as an all-or-nothing game.

There is consensus in the literature that people can hold multiple identities (Díez Medrano & Gutiérrez, 2001). For instance, ethnic minorities such as Hispanics and blacks choose a combination of American and ethnic identity if that option is offered,

meaning (presumably) that they identify with both groups at the same time (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001). Research on European identification also shows that it does not necessarily compete with national or regional identities (Kohli, 2000; Brewer, 2001; Risse, 2004), which serves to illustrate the point that multiple identities need not be zero-sum or competitive. Questions remain, however, about what types of forces lead people to adopt multiple, complex identities instead of simpler ones.

Uncertainty, need for closure and identity

The notion that people identify with social groups to reduce uncertainty (Hogg, 2000; Hogg, 2007), arises independently in two distinct literatures: ‘uncertainty-identity’ theory and ‘need-for-closure’ theory. I discuss each in turn.

As an elaboration of social identity theory, which argues that individuals identify with groups because they seek positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), uncertainty-identity theory (UI) argues that group membership and self-categorization into a group are motivated by uncertainty reduction. The process of depersonalization that takes place when we categorize people into social groups and assign them characteristics of that group also takes place when we identify ourselves as part of that group. “In this way, group identification very effectively reduces self-related uncertainty. It provides us with a sense of who we are, that prescribes what we should think, feel and do” (Hogg, 2007: 80). Research shows that uncertainty increases identification in various settings (Hogg, 2000; Reid & Hogg, 2005; Hogg, 2007; Hogg et al., 2007; Hohman, Hogg, & Bligh, 2010; Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010; Grant & Hogg, 2012).

The type of uncertainty referred to in this literature is rather broad, invoking uncertainty about oneself that is elevated by social context: “Uncertainty-identity theory focuses on uncertainty as a context-induced state. It is produced by contextual factors that challenge people’s certainty about their cognitions, perceptions, feelings and behaviors, and ultimately, certainty about and confidence in their sense of self” (Hogg, 2007: 77). Consequently, uncertainty has been operationalized in a variety of ways, such as priming uncertainty about one’s personal financial situation (Hogg, Meehan, & Farquharson, 2010) or simply by asking study participants to focus on those aspects of their lives that made them feel uncertain (Hogg et al., 2007). Still others ask respondents to read a speech or a newspaper article and underline the words or sentences that made them feel uncertain about themselves, their place in the world and their future (Hohman, Hogg, & Bligh, 2010; Grant & Hogg, 2012).

Along similar lines, the ‘need-for-closure’ (NFC) literature also relates uncertainty to in-group bias and identification levels. In this work, ‘need-for-closure’ is defined as a “desire for a definite answer to a question, any firm answer, rather than uncertainty,

confusion, or ambiguity” (Kruglanski et al., 2002: 649). NFC is theorized as a continuum that stimulates not only increased identification but also reduced information processing, increased judgmental confidence, a focus on prototypical rather than diagnostic information, and stereotypic judgment (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Moreover, NFC is understood both as being stimulated by context (e.g., situations of time pressure, physical discomfort or any other reason to be in need of a clear decision) and as varying according to individual disposition (*ibid*). Studies show that high NFC increases identification, in-group bias and out-group derogation (Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998; Kruglanski et al., 2006; Federico, Hunt, & Fisher, 2013).

Sociotropic sources of uncertainty

Both UI and NFC focus on uncertainty with respect to one’s own situation and future instead of sociotropic sources. The latter comprise individual perceptions about society and are distinct from one’s own position within it. To my knowledge, only one other study has examined the relationship between sociotropic uncertainty and identification. Studying Hong Kong, Kim and Ng (2008) argue that societal uncertainty increases the need for closure and therefore stimulates single instead of dual identities. They show negative expectations about the economy to increase the likelihood of choosing a single identity (Hongkonger or Chinese) instead of a dual one (Hongkonger and Chinese or Chinese and Hongkonger).

Broadening this logic, various types of sociotropic sources of uncertainty can be expected to increase identification with a group that provides a positive self-image and a clear common faith that will mitigate the types of uncertainty at issue. An important aspect in uncertainty-identity research is the result of a stronger in-group bias (Reid & Hogg, 2005; Grant & Hogg, 2012). Moreover, NFC research shows not only in-group favoritism but also out-group derogation (Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998; Federico, Golec, & Dial, 2005; Federico, Hunt, & Fisher, 2013). From this, it follows that if sociotropic uncertainty indeed drives stronger identification in one case, it is also likely to simultaneously mitigate other types of identification. Thus, I expect sociotropic uncertainty to mitigate multiple identification because it encourages selectivity with respect to identity choice.

I am interested in geographically defined identities of the (at least potentially) integrative variety: towns, nations, and the EU. This does not, of course, represent an exhaustive list of social groups with which people identify. If my expectation about uncertainty-reduction is valid, it could be that none of these integrative groups provide the type of security sought by individuals to mitigate their uncertainty. Sociotropic uncertainty might drive people towards other social identities that because of data

limitations I cannot study here. Therefore, I need to be cautious in interpreting any apparent ‘simplification’ in peoples’ identity profiles as a result of uncertainty, because people may identify as complexly as they did before using different ingredients that cannot be observed. This is not a problem that could ever be addressed in an entirely satisfactory manner, given the unending list of identities potentially in play. Even so, an observable *simplification* in patterns of identity, even with respect to the identities studied, is a significant finding if for no other reason than because of the uniquely integrative potential of geography rather than, e.g., race, gender, and so on. To summarize, I hypothesize that sociotropic uncertainty mitigates multiple identification, leading to a lower number of groups with which people identify and ultimately leading to no identification at all with political-geographic collective groups. Therefore, the overall hypothesis H1 reads as follows: sociotropic uncertainty mitigates multiple identification (H1).

Which types of sociotropic uncertainty are likely to matter? Three types of attitudes seem worthy contenders: societal pessimism, political distrust and negative economic expectations. I will elaborate shortly on political trust and negative economic expectations below. As is clear from the previous parts of the book, societal pessimism refers to a sentiment about the decline and perceived unmanageable deterioration of society that lacks specificity about which aspects of society are in decline. This concern about society is an uncertainty about where things are heading, which I expect to mitigate multiple identification (H1a).

Political trust has been explicitly tied to identity formation, especially at the national level (Kim & Robertson, 2002; McLaren, 2012; Citrin, Levy, & Wright, 2014). National institutions are seen as cornerstones of the nation state (Anderson, 2006 [1983]) and consequently, trust in these institutions can be seen as source of national identification. Following those who tie political trust to institutional performance (e.g. Mishler & Rose, 2001; Norris, 2011; Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012), it makes sense to view *distrust* as a dimension of sociotropic uncertainty. After all, if you believe politicians are not tackling problems appropriately, you are both uncertain and concerned about what is to be expected societally. Therefore, I also expect political distrust to mitigate multiple identification (H1b).

The literature on economic expectations uses different labels for what are very similar attitudes, e.g., consumer sentiments, general economic outlook and inflation expectation (Haller & Norpoth, 1994; Huth, Eppright, & Taube, 1994; De Boef & Kellstedt, 2004). In this literature, both egotropic and sociotropic considerations are in play. The latter often involve asking what people expect for the next year or a different period in terms of economic development, prices, and unemployment. As mentioned

above, Kim and Ng (2008) emphasize precisely this dimension of sociotropic uncertainty, showing that it mitigates multiple identification in Hong Kong. I expect a similar effect here (H1c).

I would not argue that social attitudes about the state of society, politics and the economy are exogenous to identification. Instead, they are likely to influence each other. It is easy to imagine that, for instance, national identification affects societal pessimism. However, the mechanism that is examined here is whether these attitudes of sociotropic uncertainty affect simultaneous identification, that is, multiple identification. Here, endogeneity is less likely. It is difficult to argue why multiple identification would cause uncertainty, or certainty, for that matter. Therefore, the current hypotheses assume a causal relationship.

8.3 Data and Method

To examine the effect of sociotropic uncertainty on multiple identification I use data from Eurobarometers 68.1 and 77.3 (fielded in 2007 and 2012, respectively). These surveys include the rare combination of items on both identification and the three types of sociotropic uncertainty that I consider: societal pessimism, political trust, and economic expectations. Because I do not expect the structure of the relationships I assess to vary across periods, I pooled the two waves to increase statistical power. Additionally, because EU identity is one of the key integrative identities examined, I included only respondents from one of the 25 countries that have been EU member states since 2004.³

To measure *identification* with the nation, the EU and the town/city, I use items that ask how “attached” respondents feel to each of these three polities: “not at all”, “not very much”, “fairly” and “very” attached. In terms of facial validity, these items are plausible indicators of identity’s affective dimension. Moreover, because respondents are asked about each identity independently, patterns of multiple identification are much easier to observe than with ‘prioritization’-style measures such as rankings. I recoded these variables into dichotomies: low identifiers (collapsing ‘not at all’ and ‘not very much’) and high identifiers (collapsing those who claim to be ‘fairly’ and ‘very’ attached). These dummies are then combined to create 4 categories: low identifiers (low identification with town/city, nation and EU), single identifiers (high identification with only one

3 Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

out of three), dual identifiers (high identification with two out of three) and multiple identifiers (high identification with all three). Note that this measure is entirely agnostic with respect to the geographic hierarchy of these identities.

Table 8.1 Identification categories (%)

low identifiers	3
single identifiers	8
town-only identifiers	3
nation-only identifiers	5
EU-only identifiers	1
dual identifiers	48
town avers	3
nation avers	1
EU avers	43
multiple identifiers	42

In Table 8.1, the four categories and their size are shown. Multiple identifiers and dual identifiers are the two largest groups, comprising 42% and 48% of all respondents, respectively. Eight percent are single identifiers, and only 3% are low identifiers with respect to all three collective groups. The single and dual identifiers can be further divided into three subgroups, as shown in Table 8.1. For the most part, dual identifiers are EU averse (43%), identifying instead with their town and nation: ‘anti-nationalists’ are a very rare species, with only approximately 1% of respondents belonging to this group. For the single identifiers, the nation is twice as common an object of allegiance as the town, and EU-only identity is vanishingly rare (1%).

Societal pessimism is tapped with a question about the direction citizens think their country is heading, worded as follows: “At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in [your country]”. This question is the same as the one that I used in Chapter 3 (Dutch COB data) and Chapter 5 (which also uses Eurobarometer data). It measures societal pessimism very well because of its broad scope of the country as a whole and its focus on the process (decline or improvement). The answer categories are ‘things are going in the right direction’ (optimists), ‘things are going in the wrong direction’ (pessimists), a spontaneous answer of ‘neither one nor the other’ (undecideds), with ‘don’t know’ treated as missing values.

Political distrust is measured with three items about national politics: trust in political parties, the national government and the national Parliament. Of these items, which are all dichotomous (respondents could choose “tend to trust” or

“tend not to trust”), I took the summary score. *Economic negative expectations* are measured similarly, by taking the summary score of two variables: the respondent’s expectations for the next 12 months with respect to the economic situation and national employment, respectively. The answer options for these items are better, worse or the same. The summary score is constituted of those answering ‘worse’ on those two items.

These three types of sociotropic uncertainty show weak-to-moderate correlations: societal pessimism and political distrust correlate at $r=.42$, societal pessimism and negative economic expectations correlate at $r=.37$, and political distrust and negative economic expectations correlate at $r=.26$. To enable direct comparison between the coefficients of these three sociotropic uncertainty attitudes, I dichotomized the societal pessimism indicator, comparing optimists and undecideds with pessimists, and standardized the three attitudes. On the individual level, I control for basic socio-demographic characteristics, namely, sex, age group (15-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55+), educational level (low, medium high, student), employment status (employed versus unemployed and other) and type of community (rural, small town, large city). I also control for attitudes and expectations about one’s personal circumstances to disentangle them from sociotropic uncertainty. To this end, I include a dummy variable on life satisfaction (not very or not at all satisfied versus very or fairly satisfied) and a summary score of the answer “worse” (versus better or the same) on two items on expectations for the next 12 months about personal financial circumstances (the financial situation of one’s household and one’s personal job situation). These two attitudes are also standardized to enable direct comparison with the coefficients of sociotropic uncertainty.⁴

Because the dependent variable consists of four nominal categories, the appropriate type of analysis is multinomial regression analysis. The reference group for such analyses is arbitrary, but given that my interest is in identity simplification, it makes sense to place multiple identifiers in this role. To control for the nested structure of the data in 25 countries and 2 waves, I include dummies for both countries and waves (2007 versus 2012).⁵

4 The correlations of these personal uncertainty variables with the sociotropic uncertainty variables vary between .22 and .33, with the exception of .52 between negative expectations for the national economy and personal financial circumstances.

5 It is not useful to choose multilevel analysis, because I do not have variables at the country level. I did try multilevel analysis, however, and the results are the same. Furthermore, it would not be possible to evaluate differences in explained variance at the individual level, because the variance is set to 3,29 in the multinomial multilevel analysis.

8.4 Results

Table 8.2 shows the results of model 1 only including the sociotropic uncertainty attitudes (a full model including country and wave dummies can be found in Table F1 of Appendix F). All three sociotropic attitudes show a positive, significant effect for low, single and dual identifiers (compared to multiple identifiers, the reference category). This means that being negative about developments on these three aspects of society increases the likelihood of holding fewer identities concurrently. Furthermore, comparing the coefficients of the three attitudes shows political distrust to have the strongest effect and negative economic expectations to have the weakest effect.

Table 8.2 Model 1: Effects of attitudes of sociotropic uncertainty on multiple identification^a

	low identifiers		single identifiers		dual identifiers	
	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)
attitudes of sociotropic uncertainty:						
societal pessimism	.344***	(.035)	.240***	(.023)	.205***	(.013)
political distrust	.711***	(.044)	.535***	(.025)	.395***	(.013)
negative economic expectations	.211***	(.032)	.173***	(.022)	.156***	(.013)

a Multinomial regression, reference group = multiple identifiers, coefficients are log odds. N=38454
Controlled for country and wave dummies

*** p<0.001

Table 8.3 presents the analysis including the control variables (Table F2 of Appendix F includes country and wave dummies). The effects of the sociotropic variables still hold in all nine cases, which means that all of my hypotheses are confirmed: sociotropic uncertainty decreases multiple identification and stimulates a more selective identification pattern. Additionally, many of the controls are significant as well. Because there is little work on this topic, it is worth discussing them in some detail. Younger respondents have a higher chance and older groups have a lower chance of being single identifiers. People in the city are less likely to be single or dual identifiers than those from small towns, which indicates that city dwellers are less selective about the groups with which they identify. Educational level also influences identification in some respects, with the highly educated found less often among the low and dual identifiers, and the low educated found more often among the dual than the multiple identifiers. In line with the UI and NFC literature, unemployment has a very straightforward positive effect, decreasing multiple identification significantly, just like negative expectations for one's personal financial situation, whereas life satisfaction

increases multiple identification (except for the effect of financial expectation on the difference between multiple and single identifiers, which is not significant).

Table 8.3 Model 2: effects of sociotropic uncertainty on multiple identification, including control variables^a

	low identifiers		single identifiers		dual identifiers	
	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)
attitudes of sociotropic uncertainty:						
societal pessimism	.277***	(.037)	.223***	(.024)	.173***	(.014)
political distrust	.686***	(.047)	.508***	(.026)	.376***	(.014)
negative economic expectations	.146***	(.038)	.153***	(.026)	.116***	(.015)
Control variables:						
male	-.145*	(.064)	.002	(.043)	.087***	(.025)
age (40-54):						
15-24	.592***	(.128)	.418***	(.092)	.046	(.058)
25-39	.271***	(.082)	.211***	(.056)	-.024	(.034)
55+	-.441***	(.106)	-.295***	(.068)	-.010	(.037)
educational level (medium):						
education low	.040	(.106)	.042	(.072)	.184***	(.037)
education high	-.284***	(.082)	-.017	(.052)	-.289***	(.030)
students	.130	(.176)	.217	(.119)	-.221**	(.074)
occupation (employed):						
unemployed	.312**	(.107)	.240**	(.079)	.106*	(.051)
other	-.180	(.103)	-.180**	(.066)	-.038	(.036)
community (small town):						
rural	.085	(.076)	.083	(.049)	.118***	(.029)
large city	-.039	(.082)	-.317***	(.056)	-.164***	(.031)
attitudes of personal uncertainty:						
life satisfaction	-.386***	(.033)	-.257***	(.024)	-.151***	(.014)
negative personal financial expectations	.126***	(.034)	.030	(.025)	.045**	(.015)

a Multinomial regression, reference group = multiple identifiers, coefficients are log odds. N=34808. Controlled for country and wave dummies

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

To examine whether the personal or sociotropic uncertainty variables are more important in explaining identification patterns, we can compare the effects of societal pessimism, political trust and negative economic expectations with those of life satisfaction and negative personal financial expectations, as these are all standardized. Table 8.3 shows that the effect of life satisfaction is similar in size to societal pessimism, and that the effect of negative personal financial expectations is smaller, like the expectations of the national economy. Although ideally we would compare a larger

range of both types of indicators to draw conclusions, these results show sociotropic uncertainty is by no means less important than personal uncertainty when studying identification with political-geographical groups.

To enhance the robustness of my findings, I performed some extra analyses. First, I repeated the analyses for all of the countries separately to determine whether the pattern is robust and no negative results of sociotropic uncertainty appear. This was indeed the case. Second, because the main difference between the multiple identifiers and the dual identifiers is a lack of identification with the EU, I repeated the analysis using dual identifiers as a reference category. As shown in Table F3 of Appendix F, these results replicate the findings, with the exception of the effect of negative economic expectations, which is not significant for the comparisons of dual versus low or single identifiers.

Third, I looked at the results when comparing two identities in pairwise fashion instead of three identities at the same time. Tables F4, F5 and F6 of Appendix F show the results of comparing identification with the nation and the city, the nation and the EU, and the city and the EU. Again, the hypothesis that sociotropic uncertainty makes people more selective in their identification pattern is confirmed in almost all instances and all directions. This means that sociotropic uncertainty leads to simpler patterns of identification, which for some people can involve aversion to the nation, for others to the EU, and for still others to the city. In Table F4, we see that sociotropic uncertainty stimulates identification with only the nation, only the city or neither, although it is clear that those types of identification are found among substantially different groups of citizens. The only exceptions are the effect of societal pessimism for the comparison of dual versus nation-only identifiers and negative economic expectations for the comparisons of dual versus nation-only or low identifiers. In Table F5, sociotropic uncertainty stimulates identification with only the nation, only the EU or neither. Comparing identification with the city and the EU (Table F6), I find that sociotropic uncertainty drives people toward either identification with only their city or neither the EU nor the city.

8.5 Conclusions and Discussion

In this chapter, I aimed to show the relationship between sociotropic uncertainty and a more selective and simplified identification pattern with respect to integrative, political-geographical collective groups. I find that indeed societal pessimism, political distrust, and negative economic expectations go hand-in-hand with selective (rather than multiple) identification. Political distrust has the largest effect of the three,

whereas negative economic expectations have the smallest effect. These findings persist even when controlling for various demographic and socioeconomic factors and more importantly, for the indicators of personal uncertainty that are the typical focus in research on UI or NFC.

My contribution to the sprawling empirical literature on identity-formation is to turn attention away from the strength of *specific* identities and towards the issue of how complex people's identity *profiles* appear to be. This matters for several reasons. First, empirical researchers have only begun to approach identity in this way, and the results shown here raise numerous new and interesting research questions. As just one example, I did not go into cross-national heterogeneity of identification with geographic groups; it is likely, however, that the make-up of the categories of single, dual and multiple identifiers differs among countries. When strong regional identities are present, such as in Spain, Germany or Italy, the multiple identification pattern is likely to differ from countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands or Sweden. The same goes for cross-national differences in the level of euroscepticism. This and many other questions await further research.

On a more practical level, it is generally assumed that cultural and economic globalization drive people toward increasingly complex identities; this may indeed be the case for some, but uncertainty of the kinds explored here seem to push people in the opposite direction. This is a concern because multiple, cross-cutting identifications, particularly with respect to the types of 'integrative' groups studied here, are seen as central to the functioning of polities (Easton, 1975; Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Miller, 1995; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Transue, 2007). The implications of more selective identity patterns – i.e., choosing a smaller number of identities – are therefore troublesome. If people are less willing to identify with the various political entities to which they belong concurrently, this reticence undermines these political communities just as they are confronted by significant political, social, and economic challenges.

With these results, I show once again that societal pessimism matters, in this case because it mitigates multiple identification with political-geographical collective groups. These results add to the evidence that societal pessimism is a distinct attitude, different from, in this case, political trust, negative economic expectations and satisfaction with life. It further colors the picture of societal pessimists as people who focus on specific types of collective groups, if they identify with these groups at all, and therefore seem to be exclusive rather than inclusive towards 'other groups', whichever groups those may be. With these final characterizations, I have reached the end of the theoretical and empirical exploration of the negative view about the state of society. The next chapter discusses the conclusions, contributions and implications of this book.